

SBCCOG TRANSIT AMENITIES PROJECT

FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY OF TEN SOUTH BAY BUS STOPS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In February, March, and April 2001 we surveyed 474 riders waiting for the bus at ten bus stop sites in the South Bay area. The surveys took place between 8:00 a.m. and 18:00 p.m. To obtain a representative sample of South Bay bus riders, all bus stop sites were surveyed during the early morning, mid-day, early and late afternoon hours on weekdays and Saturdays. The bus stops surveyed were the following:

Santa Fe and Del Amo—Blue Line stop in Carson
Hawthorne and Pacific Coast Highway (Northbound and Southbound) in Torrance
Hawthorne and Pacific Coast Highway (Eastbound and Westbound) in Torrance
Pacific Coast Highway and Crenshaw (Eastbound) in Torrance
Hawthorne and Artesia—Southwest corner (South Bay Galleria) in Redondo Beach
Pacific Coast Highway and Avenue 1 (Northbound and Southbound) in Redondo Beach
Hawthorne and 147th (Northbound and Eastbound)—Lawndale
Pacific and 7th (Northbound)—San Pedro
South Bay Pavilion—Carson
Hawthorne and Silver Spur (Northbound)—Rolling Hills Estates

Survey instrument

The survey instrument was composed of twenty-four questions designed to identify: 1) the socio-demographic characteristics of South Bay bus riders; 2) frequency, purpose, and time of bus trips; 3) level of satisfaction with the existing bus service and bus stop amenities; 4) desirable bus stop amenities; 5) perceived safety on the bus and at the bus stop; 6) problems encountered at the bus stop; and 7) suggested improvements that could also act as incentives for increased ridership.

The survey was administered in English and Spanish. Three hundred and two riders (63.7%) chose to respond in English, while one hundred and seventy-two riders (36.3%) chose to respond in Spanish.

1. Socio-demographic characteristics of bus riders

Half of the riders surveyed were male and the other half female (see Figure 1). Latinos (48.9%) were the most prominent racial group, followed by African Americans (24.3%), and Whites (20.3%). Asians represented only 5.1% of the sample (Figure 2). At three bus stops, Santa Fe and Del Amo (Carson), South Bay Pavilion (Carson), and Hawthorne and 147th (Lawndale) the majority of riders were African American. Latinos represented the most dominant racial group in the other seven bus stop sites.

All age groups were represented at the bus stops (Figure 3). Thirteen percent of the riders were less than 18 years old. However, four bus stops had a much higher proportion of young riders: Hawthorne and Silver Spur (30%); South Bay Pavilion (26%); Hawthorne and 147th (22%); and Pacific and 7th (17%). Conversely, the bus stops at Hawthorne and PCH and Crenshaw and PCH had only a small segment of young riders (3-5%). A bit over 8% of the riders were over sixty. Two bus stops, however, had a significant larger number of senior riders. Seventeen percent of the riders at Hawthorne and 147th and sixteen percent of the riders at South Bay Pavilion were over sixty years old.

Most of the riders surveyed chose not to answer the question about their income level. Based on the responses of 138 riders we found that 45.7% of the sample earned less than \$25,000; 26.1% earned between \$25,000-\$49,999; 18.1% earned between \$50,000-\$74,999; 6.5% earned between \$75,000-\$99,999. Only 3.6% of the respondents stated that they earn over \$100,000 (Figure 4).

Almost half of the respondents were working full time; 23.2% were employed part-time; 15.9% were students; 5.7% were retirees; while 7.8% reported unemployed. A small segment of the sample listed “other” employment, which included household work (as house wives), or on and off employment. (Figure 5).

Almost one third of the sample (32.4%) were transit-dependent, not having any car in their household. Almost another third (32.6%) reported having only one car in their household; 22.4% of the respondents stated that their household owned two cars; 10% stated having three household cars; and a very small number (2.6%) reported having more than three household cars (Figure 6).

2. Frequency, purpose, and time of bus trips

A common characteristic of bus riders at all ten bus stops was their frequent use of the bus service. More than half of the respondents (52.5%) said that they ride the bus every day, while another 21.9% stated that they use the bus system frequently (3-5 times per week). Only a small percentage of respondents (11.4%) claimed to be rare users of the system (Figure 7).

Two thirds of the bus riders surveyed ride the bus to and from work. While no specific question about place of residence was asked, a number of respondents stated that they did not live in the South Bay area, but were only working here. One third of the sample listed that they use the bus to go shopping; one quarter of respondents ride the bus to and from

school; 21.5% ride the bus for social and recreational purposes (visit friends, go to the movies, etc.); and 29.5% ride the bus to conduct some personal business (medical visit, banking, etc.). Figure 8 shows the stated purpose of the respondent's bus trip on the day of the survey.

Most riders said that they use the bus in the early morning hours (6:00-9:00 a.m.) and the late afternoon hours (3:00-6:00 p.m.). About one third of the riders (32.8%) use the bus system during late morning (9:00-12:00), and about another third (30.8%) ride the buses in the early afternoon hours (3:00-6:00 p.m.). Twenty-seven percent of the respondents also use the system in the evening (6:00-8:00 p.m.). In fact a few riders complained that the bus service stops quite early. Only a small percentage (9.0%) of the respondents reported riding buses between 8:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. (Figure 9). However, the surveyed sample may not be representative of night-time riders, as the surveys were conducted between 8:00 a.m. and 18:00 p.m.

3. Level of satisfaction with bus service and bus stop amenities

The survey found a major discontent among bus riders in regards to the frequency and reliability of the bus service. Indeed the most important issue for the majority of interviewees was the "late and unreliable buses." A significant amount of people said that they had to wait between one and two hours for the bus if they had to ride off-peak hours. Many complained about the lack of coordination in the bus service, as riders often have to wait for a long time and then there are two or three buses passing one after the other. Some claimed that the first bus in the morning often fails to come at all. Many complained that bus drivers often fail to stop at the bus stop. Several respondents, mostly Latinos, claimed that they had lost their jobs as a consequence of the unreliable bus service. Since transit-dependent workers often work in low-wage, low security jobs, arriving late one or two times is often enough to get fired.

Bus riders who have experienced bus service in other countries were often very disappointed with the bus service here. A man from Sri Lanka stated that he had traveled to many countries of the Third World, and nowhere was the service as bad as in Los Angeles. A typical comment was that of a Mexican immigrant woman who stated that transit amenities are of secondary importance to her as long as the buses come on time.

Although a few respondents stated that bus riders were helpful and friendly, many more complained about rude drivers. A general complaint was that drivers would not wait even for a few seconds if a passenger came running from the other side of the street to catch the bus. Some also mentioned that drivers should not wait so long to call the police if a passenger gets harassed or threatened.

Overall, riders were more satisfied with the Torrance and Gardena transit service than with the MTA service. Some remarked that the MTA service has improved somewhat since the driver's strike.

4. Desired bus stop amenities

On the positive side, there were not many complaints heard in regards to the transit amenities offered at the bus stops. Indeed, some noted that the South Bay bus stops are in a much nicer area and offer more amenities than other bus stops in metropolitan Los Angeles (such as for example in Downtown, Watts, Compton, or Wilmington). Some complaints were context-specific (e.g. the presence of homeless and transients in South Bay Galleria; the placement of the bus stop very near the street and poor lighting at Hawthorne and 147th; the inadequacy of the shelter to protect from rain in South Bay Galleria; the lack of a shelter at PCH and Crenshaw).

Most of the respondents felt that all the transit amenities listed on question 6 of the survey should be present. However, bus shelters, benches, trashcans, and proper lighting were deemed as the most important amenities at the bus stop (Figure 10).

5. Perceived safety on the bus and at the bus stop

The vast majority of riders (85.4%) considered South Bay bus stops to be safe, while 88.4% of the respondents felt safe on South Bay buses. Also 77.6% of the respondents felt safe walking to and from the bus stop. Only a minority of respondents (15.6%) stated they had been victims of any crime on a bus or at a bus stop in the last two years. Also a small percentage (13.5%) said that a relative had been a victim of transit crime in the last two years. In most cases, such crime involved obscene language, harassment, or threats. Only on a few occasions women got their purses torn off at a bus stop while they were exiting the bus. A relatively small number of respondents have witnessed the following incidents at the bus stop: disorderly contact (15.6%), panhandling (13.3%), drunkenness (18.4%), vandalism (12.9%), pickpockets (7.2%), jewelry snatching (4.5%), drug use/sales (9.8%), threats (8.6%), robbery (6%), violent crime (7.2%). A relatively larger number of people have noticed the same incidents on the bus: disorderly contact (42.6%), panhandling (17.9%), drunkenness (30.3%), vandalism (27.8%), pickpockets (13.1%), jewelry snatching (11.7%), drug use/sales (17%), threats (20.4%), robbery (11.4%), violent crime (11.4%). A minority of riders (23.4%) stated that they try to avoid certain bus routes for safety reasons.

Figure 11 shows what riders perceive to be the most important attributes for bus stop safety. More than half of the respondents (58.1%) said that they would feel safer if they had to wait less time at the bus stop. Fifty-three percent of the respondents said that more police patrolling would make bus stops safer. Better lighting and public phones were also considered important safety attributes.

6. Problems encountered at the bus stop

Table 1 lists the riders' complaints and encountered problems at the bus stop. The majority of these problems (75.8% of all complaints) regarded the quality of the bus service. Fifteen percent of the complaints involved the lack of a transit amenity at the bus stop or the presence of undesirable elements (such as trash). A small number of complaints (9.2%) involved the environment of the bus stop and the presence of undesirable social elements (e.g. transients, drunks, rowdy kids, bad people).

Table 1: Encountered Problems

BUS SERVICE	Number of complaints	BUS STOP AMENITIES	Number of complaints	BUS STOP ENVIRONMENT	Number of complaints
Late buses	81	No bus shelter	8	Transients	10
Unreliable buses	24	Inadequate lighting	7	Rowdy kids	2
Rude drivers	21	Trash	6	Drunks	2
Buses don't stop	17	No bus timetable	5	Desolate	2
Infrequent service	9	Too close to street	3	Assaults	2
Overcrowded buses	5	Inadequate seating	2	Bad people	1
Bad coordination	3	No public phones	2	Harassment	1
Trips take too long	3	No restrooms	1	Bad area	1
Service stops early	2				
Buses break down	2				
Drivers don't wait	2				
Doors don't work	2				
Broken windows	1				
Difficult to get student discounts	1				
Disabled passes not always honored	1				
TOTAL	172		34		21

7. Suggested improvements / incentives for increased ridership

While a few frustrated riders stated that they would get a car as soon as they could afford it, so that they wouldn't have to ride the bus, many more indicated that they would use the service more often if certain things were improved. It is clear from the previous discussion that a lot of emphasis should be given on trying to improve the frequency, reliability, and coordination of the bus service. Over half of the respondents stated that they would ride the buses more often if they would become more frequent and reliable. Improvements in the safety and cleanliness of buses and bus stops also mattered, but only to about a third of the respondents. From one quarter to one third of the respondents said that they would use the system more often if there was less crowding, more comfortable seats, lower fares, or if they had easier access to the bus. Figure 12 shows all the attributes that would make riders use the system more frequently.

The provision of certain transit amenities at the bus stop represents a second area of improvements. Overall, bus riders were quite content with the level and type of amenities offered at South Bay bus stops. All the surveyed bus stops had benches and trash cans, but not all them had bus shelters (the amenity ranked as the most important by riders). While South Bay bus stops were considered safe, some riders felt that the existence of

better lighting, public phones, or a direct police phone line would further increase safety. Finally, many felt that a posted timetable would be a very important amenity at the bus stop, as long as buses would follow it.

Validity and Generalizability of Findings

The survey sample was not a random sample of all South Bay riders, since only ten bus stop sites were targeted. However, we are reasonably assured that the findings are valid and quite generalizable to the population of South Bay riders for the following reasons:

The ten sites represented diverse South Bay areas and different municipalities.

All bus stops were surveyed at different days of the week and on Saturdays.

All bus stops were surveyed during the early morning, mid-day, early afternoon, and late afternoon/early evening hours.

All bus riders present at the bus stop during the survey times were asked to complete the survey.

While the socio-demographic characteristics of those surveyed varied from one bus stop site to the other, we found great consistency in the riders' responses in terms of their expressed levels of satisfaction with the buses and bus stops, the perceived transit safety, the desired transit amenities, the encountered problems, and the incentives for increased ridership.